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SUBJECT: MALAWI: AMBASSADOR REVIEWS RELATIONS WITH NEW
FOREIGN MINISTER

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador Peter W. Bodde, Reason: 1.5(b)

1.(U) SUMMARY: In an initial courtesy call with new Foreign Minister Etta Banda, the Ambassador highlighted U.S. assistance in the health and agricultural sectors as well as the 300 million USD in Millennium Challenge (MCC) funds in the pipeline for the energy and transport sectors. He praised Malawi's May 2009 elections, commenting that the process helped institutionalize the country's young democracy. The pair also discussed the delayed deployment of Malawian troops to the UN peacekeeping mission in Chad. Minister Banda conveyed President Mutharika's appreciation for U.S. assistance and confirmed that the MFA is engaged in a review of Malawi's foreign policy. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) The Ambassador, accompanied by the DCM, paid a courtesy call on recently-appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs (Professor) Etta Banda August 4 to discuss how the U.S. and Malawi can maintain their positive relationship. Etta Banda was appointed to the President's cabinet in June of this year and is an active member of the National Governing Council of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). She earned a masters degree in Community Health from Boston University and pursued graduate studies at the University of Maryland. She is a registered nurse and has worked previously as a Child Health Advisor for Management Sciences for Health, an international NGO.

13. (U) The Ambassador congratulated Minister Banda on her appointment. He described the positive relationship between the U.S. and Malawi, and highlighted U.S. assistance in the health and agricultural sectors. He noted that Malawi was the first country to sign a PEPFAR partnership framework, and that an MCC compact would mean 300 million USD for the country's energy and transport sectors. The Ambassador added that the U.S. wanted to support President Mutharika's Green Belt Initiative, which seeks to increase the amount of land under irrigation. Ambassador offered USG expertise to assist with the initiative.

14. (U) The Ambassador also mentioned US support to Malawi during the lead-up to the May 2009 elections. He added that the elections had helped to institutionalize democracy, and that Malawi was quickly becoming an African success story.

15. (U) The Ambassador raised the issue of the Malawian Defense Force battalion's delayed deployment to the UN operation in Chad. He explained that the battalion needed an additional 15 million USD in equipment to meet UN standards. Citing extensive U.S. training and equipment support of the planned deployment, the Ambassador urged the Minister to help find a way to finance the shortfall in equipment. He argued that the deployment of the battalion would provide an opportunity for Malawi to contribute to UN efforts and raise the country's profile in the international arena. The Minister agreed with this assessment and said she would look into the issue.

16. (U) Minister Banda noted that she and her ministry were in a learning period. She indicated she would like to build the capacity of her diplomatic work force and welcomed any help from the USG to further develop her staff professionally. The Ambassador indicated he would seek ways to support her ministry's development. Minister Banda praised the strong bilateral partnership, and conveyed

President Bingu wa Mutharika's appreciation for USG support to Malawi's development.

¶7. (C) COMMENT: Minister Banda appears to enjoy President Mutharika's confidence, but her limited international affairs experience means a steep learning curve. She does bring a long and positive association with the United States to her position. Post will work closely with her to ensure a positive working relationship as well as to assist Banda in the professional development of her Ministry. END COMMENT.

BODDE